

## CURIOUS COURTING CUSTOMS!

Some curious courting customs prevail in Africa. In one tribe of Eastern Africa it is regarded as the ne plus ultra of gallantry for the lover to parade before the hut of his innamorata astride of a huge boar. Mungo Park tells of a tribe in the interior where custom compels a woman to carry a calabash of water to the man who has expressed a preference for her. Seated on a mat before his door he washes his hands in the vessel, and then the woman drinks the water as a token of her affection. Less repulsive was the act of the lover among the ancient Persians, who burned his hand or cheek to prove his devotion, and then showed it to his lady love. If she was "willin'" she bound the injured part with a silken scarf, but if obdurate she sent the man to the physician for healing salve.

Among the Moravians it was the custom for the minister to select wives for the men of his generation. If a "sister" had any objection to the "brother" selected for her life partner, she was permitted to state it, but it was generally overruled by the priest's eloquence. Strange to say, the historian tells us that these marriages were generally happy.

In Greenland the services of the pastor of his flock are also called in. A man who has made up his mind that his worldly circumstances warrant him in indulging in what has been called "the abstract desire of every man to furnish board and lodging to some young lady," and has decided which young lady he wishes to be taxed for, calls on the reverend father and states the case. The inquiry is made whether the girl knows of the suit, to which the man replies that he has made some preliminary love making, which was not very kindly received, but adds: "Thou knowest the ways of mankind." In Greenland, he it remarked, it is an accepted fact in social philosophy that a woman's no means yes. The priest calls upon the young woman and pleads the case of her lover, assuring her that he is a good man, that he catches many seals, etc. It is the custom for the woman to reject all proposals at first, but to yield at last an unwilling assent. If the priest thinks she is too obstinate he generally remarks: "Ah, well, it's no matter; I can easily find another woman who will have such a good provider," and turns to leave, which action brings the stubborn maiden to terms at once.

In St. Petersburg, Russia, a custom prevailed for many years—though declined greatly in importance, it has not gone wholly out of use—which was designed to stimulate laggards in courtship. Whit Sunday there was held in the Summer Garden, one of the city parks, a fair of all the damsels of the city who wanted husbands. Dressed in their best, with all the ornaments at command, and holding silver spoons or other ware in their hands to show that they were not wholly portionless, they stood in rows under the trees, attended by parents or guardians to insure propriety of behavior, to facilitate matrimonial bargains. The men in search of wives strolled about scrutinizing all the candidates at leisure. When a man saw one that pleased him, he usually introduced himself to her custodians, and if his statement of family, business, habits and prospects were satisfactory, he was made acquainted with the young woman and invited to her residence. After this the nuptial ceremony followed as speedily as the would-be bridegroom desired.

We find a custom precisely like this still in existence in a district in the south of Ireland. There it is known as "shraffing," the name being derived from Shrove Tuesday, the day on which it is held. On that day all the marriageable young people of both sexes are marshaled on the village green by the parents, the girls in all the glory of Sunday gowns and gay ribbons, as lovely as fresh-blown roses, evidently enjoying their blushes, and the young men, also in their best attire, looking as foolish as only the male human can look on exhibition. The two sexes are stationed in line apart from each other, and the parents pass between to vouchsafe proposals or to receive them, and to haggle over marriage portions. The preferences of the young people are fully understood by the elders, and commendable effort is made to gratify them, the main object of the parents being to secure as good a set-out as possible for the young couples.

A California miner having amassed quite a fortune, was returning by ship to New York to revisit old friends and find him a wife. A young woman on board the ship, serving in the capacity of nursery governess to the family of a merchant on board, pleased him much by her neat and modest appearance. He therefore introduced himself one day, and broke the ice of his purpose with one reckless plunge: "Madame, my name is —; my parents and family reside in New Hampshire; I have property amounting to \$200,000, and expect to engage in business in —. I am a perfectly temperate man, and can give you good reference to testify of my general upright character. I am unmarried and want a wife. Will you marry me?" The lady took in the character of her suitor at once. "Thank you," said she, "I will," and on landing they were forthwith married.

The Rev. Richard Hooker had no time to devote to courtship, and therefore, deputed his landlady, Mrs. Churchman, to find him a wife. She selected her daughter, Joan, but the unfortunate divine no doubt often quoted in the recesses of his soul in after years the old saying, "Marry in haste to repent at leisure." For Joan proved a terrible shrew, and led the poor minister a wretched life of it. Counting by proxy in a dangerous thing, whether a plausible old lady or a bosom friend is employed to do it. So the Saxon King Edgar found it when he sent his friend Athelstan to report on the charms of a lady called the most beautiful in that Kingdom, and to offer her the office of Queen should she prove to be as lovely as reported. But Athelstan fell in love with her himself, and wooed and married her, and then told the King she was not beautiful at all, only being rich. When the King found out how he had been deceived Athelstan had to lose not only his beautiful wife and her wealth, but his head into the bargain.

A writer, whose veracity, however, we dare not touch for, gives the following as an actual statute recorded in the old

Saxon code, giving to the lady the privilege that she has taken such poor advantage of: "Albeit, as often as leape yearre doth occur, the womanne holdeth prerogative over the manne in matters of courtship, love and matrimony; so that when the lady proposeth it shall not be lawful for the manne to say her nae, but he shall entertain her proposal in all gude courtesie." However, whether this law was ever placed on record or not, the practice of female proposals was never adopted, and seems never to have been more than a tradition. There have been instances, of course, of a woman who dared, but not many, as the risk of a refusal was too serious a one to run. How the Princess Louise of Savoy ever recovered from her humiliation after having offered herself to Charles, Duke of Bourbon, only to receive a grave but positive refusal, few women can understand. Ladies, however, are permitted to assist a bashful wooer.—*Exchange.*

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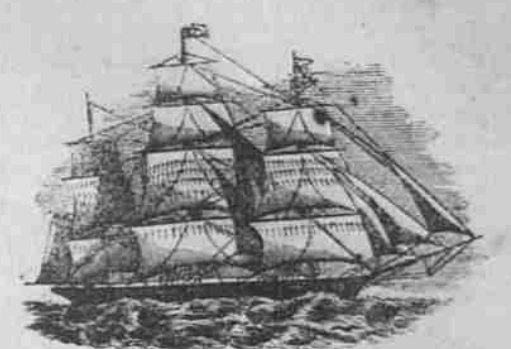
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